

House Budget Committee Members' Day Testimony

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February 3, 2016

Mr. Chairman: I would first like to thank Chairman Price and Ranking Member Van Hollen for providing the opportunity for Members to testify before the Budget Committee.

Only in Washington could a year-over-year spending increase be considered a cut. But that is how far removed from reality our federal budgeting process has become. I am asking the Budget Committee to adopt the concept of zero-based budgeting. Rather than the current budget process of near-guaranteed budget increases each year, this would require each agency to justify their expenditures, mission, and goals each year.

Back in the 3rd District of Iowa and across the country, families don't have the luxury of assuming a bigger household budget each year. Since the recession in 2008, earnings and median income have not recovered. Every weekend when I'm back home I hear from people about the fears and uncertainties they face while working paycheck to paycheck, struggling to provide for their families.

Families in Iowa and across the country must continually evaluate each of their expenses. It's high time we put that same level of scrutiny to how their tax dollars are spent.

As I'm sure you're well aware, the Congressional Budget Office recently released its latest assessment of our deficit and debt outlook. For the first time since the recession, our annual deficit increased this past year. Our national debt just surpassed \$19 trillion, and we are projected to accumulate about another \$10 trillion in deficits over the next decade.

The major driver of our projected debt comes from our necessary entitlement programs including Social Security and Medicare. However, one of the most chilling projections in the report is that economic growth will hover around two percent for the next five years. This is simply not enough growth for Americans to prosper and our fiscal outlook to improve.

In Congress we face a complex challenge in getting our debt under control. We can't change some of the underlying factors driving up debt, such as our aging population. But we can begin to tackle our debt by taking immediate steps to address the things we can control – wasteful spending and working to promote economic opportunity and growth.

We need to deliver a more accountable, efficient, and effective government for hardworking Americans. An important part of that is simply accounting for costs and not wasting taxpayer dollars. Federal agencies should be keeping up with the rest of America in learning to do more

with less, and prioritizing resources on the things that matter most. Each agency should be required to do this every single year.

While finding cost savings is important and necessary, I want to stress that zero-based budgeting is not about nickel and diming federal agencies. It's about continually reevaluating our priorities – what these agencies are working towards, and how that will impact families back home.

Congress needs to be a bigger part of setting the agenda for these agencies. Zero-based budgeting will help bring these decisions into the annual budget process and give a voice to Americans.

There is a very real sense among hardworking Americans that Washington is working hard against them, not for them. Last year, seventy-two percent of America's small businesses reported that regulations were the number one factor hurting their "operating environment." Washington's regulatory machine cost our economy nearly \$2 trillion last year as job creators lost time, money, and opportunities struggling to comply. That means fewer jobs and smaller paychecks for hardworking families.

Washington can't and shouldn't micromanage the inner workings of our economy. The lack of a recovery since the beginning of the Great Recession is all the evidence needed to prove that point.

What government can do is foster a fertile ground for economic opportunity and growth in wages and jobs. That's what families and job creators need now as they struggle with stagnant wages and fewer opportunities. But it's also the best medicine for our deteriorating fiscal outlook.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony before the Committee. Hardworking taxpayers deserve a more efficient and accountable federal government – one that looks out for their tax dollar and gets out of the way of job creators. To that end, I hope that you will give zero-based budgeting serious and thorough consideration.